



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

Edinburgh Research Explorer

Book review: Christianity in India. From beginnings to the present. By Robert Eric Frykenberg

Citation for published version:

Harding, C 2010, 'Book review: Christianity in India. From beginnings to the present. By Robert Eric Frykenberg', *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, vol. 61, no. 1, pp. 155-156.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022046909991667>

Digital Object Identifier (DOI):

[10.1017/S0022046909991667](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022046909991667)

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Published In:

The Journal of Ecclesiastical History

Publisher Rights Statement:

© Harding, C. (2010). Book review: Christianity in India. From beginnings to the present. By Robert Eric Frykenberg. *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 61(1), 155-156doi: 10.1017/S0022046909991667

General rights

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Edinburgh Research Explorer is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy

The University of Edinburgh has made every reasonable effort to ensure that Edinburgh Research Explorer content complies with UK legislation. If you believe that the public display of this file breaches copyright please contact openaccess@ed.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.



sources, through Christian writers, to responses to Esther in art, music, drama and literature. This is undoubtedly a *tour de force* of sources in English and English translation (almost no German sources are referred to), and although the sheer quantity of information is at times overwhelming, readers will gain a rich impression of the way in which the book of Esther has provoked responses from many and differing spheres over a long period of time. A small technical point is that transliterations from Hebrew sometimes begin with an opening quotation mark which has no corresponding closing mark. This makes it look as though the Hebrew letter ‘ayin is being transliterated, when this is not the case.

SHEFFIELD

J. W. ROGERSON

Christianity in India. From beginnings to the present. By Robert Eric Frykenberg. (Oxford History of the Christian Church.) Pp. xxxi + 564 incl. 8 maps and 13 ills + 13 plates. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. £75. 978 0 19 826377 7
JEH (61) 2010; doi:10.1017/S0022046909991667

The sheer range and complexity of scholarship on various themes in Indian life and history places the interested non-specialist in profound need of writers who can bring together, interpret and communicate. The story of Christianity in India, once imagined rather simply in terms of a paternalistic European enterprise linked with imperialism, has developed in the last few years into one of these complex themes, with Robert Frykenberg playing a major role both in moving the debate forward and giving it a wider audience. His contributions to *Studies in the History of Christian Missions* are a case in point. The present volume, running from the (disputed) Indian ministry of the Apostle Thomas right through to the emergence of Christian states in the north-east of post-colonial India, treats the Indian context as ‘one of several manifestations of a newly emerging world Christianity, in which Christians of a post-Christian West are a minority’ (p. v). The result is a study committed to providing readers with the detailed background on India – geography, anthropology, religious culture, caste, language – essential to understanding the ‘transcultural interactions within Hindu and Muslim environments’ (p. v) that shaped Indian Christianity. Frykenberg’s three introductory chapters, which also include a section on Christian expansion and historiography, make up a significant chunk of the book, but no more so than is necessary if over-simplification later on is to be avoided. The analysis moves on through the Thomas tradition, the arrival of the Portuguese and the resulting conflicts between two Christianities, and the avalanche of Protestant missionaries from Europe and north America in the modern period. Frykenberg reminds readers throughout of the extent to which evangelism and creativity tended to reside with Indians themselves, and less so with under-resourced foreign missionaries whose communication skills were far from perfect and who often knew little of the communication networks and metaphors employed by Indians until the principal work of evangelism had been all but completed. Other major themes include empire and resistance, struggles over ecclesiastical authority, the content and institutions of education, the conversion of oppressed peoples and the notion of social as well as spiritual transformation. This amounts to a fairly comprehensive treatment, if not in regional terms – the north-west of India is relatively underrepresented, and is

well-served instead by John Webster's *Social history of Christianity: north-west India since 1800* – then certainly in thematic terms. In addition to a broad general readership, *Christianity in India* would be well-suited for university courses and to postgraduate students embarking on studies in world or Indian Christianity.

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

CHRISTOPHER HARDING

Das lateinische Christentum und die antike pagane Bildung. By Peter Gemeinhardt. (Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum, 41.) Pp. xii + 596. Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2007. €89 (paper). 978 3 16 149305 8; 1436 3003
JEH (61) 2010; doi:10.1017/S0022046909991692

The relationship between Christianity and classical culture is by any measure a well-worked field. The main questions are well-known, the main texts notorious, the main paradoxes still paradoxical. In the near future, the most progress is perhaps likely to be made through the study of documentary texts, which reveal the detail, insofar as we can recover it, of individual Christian lives and the practices of communities. Peter Gemeinhardt makes an important contribution to that project in this learned, wide-ranging and incisive study of Christianity and 'pagan' culture in the (mainly) Latin-speaking west.

Gemeinhardt takes as his focus those aspects of culture which are expressed and reproduced in education, specifically in *enkyklios paideia*, and within that, in the study of literature, grammar and rhetoric. These, he argues, are what 'pagan culture' – or at least the problematic part of it – largely meant to Christians. After summarising current trends in scholarship on Christianity and *paideia*, he sketches recent developments in the history of education, which have tended to stress that education was highly socially functional, often in practical ways which have little to do with appreciating language or literature for their own sake. This view of education forms the background to Gemeinhardt's own argument and fits nicely with his approach.

Gemeinhardt re-examines the evidence for the literary culture of pre-Constantinian Christian writers in the west (including those writing in Greek), and explores the diverse ways in which they used it – as an intellectual tool, as a weapon in polemic against both non-Christians and alleged heretics, and as a basis for *rapprochement* between Christianity and secular culture. So far, so conventional, but Gemeinhardt follows this with a detailed investigation of the documentary evidence for Christian teachers in schools before Constantine (a period less well-investigated than the later fourth century). He then discusses the Christianising of the upper classes in the fourth century, showing that there was more discussion and conflict between Christians and non-Christians, over a longer period, than we have realised, and exploring how culture was used in those debates. Returning to the literary culture of Christians, he uses the evidence of epigraphy (mainly gravestones), letters and hagiography to show how widespread literary culture was among 'ordinary Christians' (i.e. not bishops and theologians, and not necessarily the very rich). The theme of all these sections is how warmly a wide range of Christians embraced classical culture, and how widely they advertised their cultural accomplishments.